

VZCZCXRO2567
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #0612/01 0771028
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 181028Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3582
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000612

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/18/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: U.S. ASSISTANCE AND ENGAGEMENT KEY TO PEACE AND
DEVELOPMENT IN MINDANAO

REF: MANILA 562

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for reasons 1.4(b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. I just spent several days driving up the spine of Central Mindanao to talk with people from all walks of life, to listen to views, and to assess prospects for peace and development. Despite the frustration of the past six months as the peace process broke down and fighting began anew, I heard a clear and strong desire for peace from all sectors. Assistance from the United States, whether through our USAID projects, from the U.S. military, or from American-led companies or NGOs makes an incredible difference in fostering a positive climate for peace and prosperity. Our engagement draws others in as well. Spurred by our work, the Philippine Government has made important investments in infrastructure in Central Mindanao. Small grants from the United States have created large NGO communities involved in peace building. Our contributions to UN agencies, such as UNICEF and World Food Program, have drawn in contributions from the EU, Japan and other countries. The very clear message from all was the importance of continued engagement in Mindanao by the United States. We are making an important difference and have every reason to be proud of the role our assistance plays in Mindanao. End Summary.

¶2. (U) I often visit Mindanao to talk with leaders, meet with beneficiaries of US programs and view US-sponsored projects. I wanted this trip to offer chances to listen to as many sectors possible to gauge prospects for peace and the impact of our assistance. I spent two days driving from General Santos City to Cotabato City. Reftel describes the trip and our many stops in more detail.

¶3. (C) The impact of the programs we fund in Mindanao is tremendous. Our assistance has brought insurgents off the battlefield and into the agriculture fields. We visited a still poor village where the standard of living has dramatically increased thanks to income from USAID projects including vegetable cultivation, a solar dryer for rice/corn and construction of a small bridge so that products can get to market. Villagers couldn't say thank you often enough. All of them urged that we not forget Mindanao and that we spread the word about the difference a productive life makes in solving conflicts. I talked with NGOs and community leaders involved in conflict mediation projects (some funded by USAID, but not all). Their dedication and determination to achieve peace was overwhelming. Each phrased their insights differently but their message was the same: American assistance matters deeply to us and American efforts to promote peace and development are indispensable.

¶4. (C) We sat down in a camp for displaced persons with local officials and representatives of NGO relief organizations. Most of the workers have not had a day off since fighting resumed last August. They described frightened people, a crushing burden on local social

resources in already poor communities, and a need to end the conflict so that lives can improve. They also - - unsolicited - - praised US humanitarian contributions for displaced people as well as assistance from the US military in terms of medical assistance and simple items, such as hand crank radios.

15. (C) It is easy to become frustrated with the slow process of building a cease-fire and getting the parties back to peace talks. It is easy to note that our engagement in Mindanao goes back more than a decade and to wonder if maybe we haven't already done enough. But the honest assessment is that, in tandem with the crucial support our military forces provide their Philippine counterparts, our assistance has improved the quality of life for millions of people. Our assistance and engagement have given so many in Mindanao a chance to have a productive future. And in doing so, we have removed many who would harm United States interests from the battlefield and made the lives of our citizens safer and more productive as a result. Despite the renewed fighting in recent months, the sentiment on the ground at the heart of the conflict in Central Mindanao is overwhelmingly in favor of peace.

16. (C) Our assistance to Mindanao is slowly but surely creating a cadre of people who see a future free from violence and extremism. Our engagement has convinced others to participate as well. Japan, the EU and Australia now all contribute some development assistance. Several Organization of Islamic Countries have built schools and mosques. But no nation has the sort of special relationship with the Philippines that we do. No nation has our degree of access,

MANILA 00000612 002 OF 002

acceptability or influence. Our continued engagement is vital to push all sides to resume negotiations and establish a cease-fire. Our continued assistance is critical to the path out of poverty and violence for communities desperate for a better future.

KENNEY